

Shock. Disbelief. Anger. Rage.

Those were the emotions that consumed most of the DWE staff Sept. 11, 2001.

Five years later, the memories of that day were part of conversations throughout the building.

John Wyvill, who was then commissioner of Arkansas Rehabilitation Services, was in his office getting ready to go to a meeting at the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center when his wife called with the news of the planes hitting the Twin Towers. "We couldn't believe it was happening," he says. "I just remember a rage – an anger at an attack on American soil." He also remembers the quietness of that day – in the cafeteria and in the lack of traffic when he returned to Little Rock from Hot Springs.

Holly Beason, communications, was in the workforce training office with Lee Griffith and Oleda Potter when the first call came in. Then it was call after call after call. "I don't think we really believed what was going on," Holly says. Once the depth of the tragedy sunk in, she wanted to go home but was afraid that something else was about to happen.

Elizabeth Stewart, human resources, went to class that morning. Her professor, who was from New York, came into class all frantic with the news. After class, Elizabeth called her mom to confirm it. By then, the Pentagon had been hit and Flight 93 was missing. "I was angry," Elizabeth says, "because someone had purposely attacked us." And, knowing that the United States had helped Osama bin Laden in the past, she felt as if he had "stabbed us in the back."

Hervey Galloway, career and technical education, watched the footage on television. When asked how he felt, he says, "it's hard to describe – to think that there are people in this world who think that's the right thing to do because of their religious beliefs."

In finance, the news came from Chris Minogue, who was at the Guard that morning. When Chris called the office, "we didn't believe her," Elaine Powell says.

"We just could not believe her," Ida Jo Creed echoes. "We just didn't know what to think." They quickly turned to the Internet for more news.

Sara Patterson, Veterans Approving Agency, was in the office with Emil Mackey preparing for a DWE staff meeting. "Kay (Owens) calls us and says, 'Turn on the radio. You're not going to believe this,'" Sara recalls. While she was on the phone with Kay, the second plane hit the tower. "Oh, my God. Oh, my God," Kay said repeatedly over the phone as she watched the live news coverage.

It was a somber group that gathered for the staff meeting, which opened with a prayer. "That was just so surprising – and so refreshing – that it started with a prayer," Sara says. "You could tell the group really needed that."

For Priscilla Flowers, adult education, the initial disbelief turned to grief. Melissa, a close friend, had been at work at the World Trade Center and

had not been heard from. The rest of that day and all that night, Priscilla and Melissa's family waited for news. "They never found any trace of her," Priscilla says. "That was awful."

The days and months that followed were filled with apprehension, reflection, and the sense that the world had suddenly changed forever. Staff members who had to fly anywhere reconsidered their plans. Hervey admits he was apprehensive when he had to fly to a meeting six months later.

"I didn't really like to fly to start with," Ida Jo says. The attack by plane deepened that sense of dread. But it wasn't just flying. Soon after 9/11 came the anthrax scare. Any staff handling mail had to wear gloves and be on the lookout for anything suspicious.

"There was just something all the time that wouldn't let us settle down," Ida Jo says.

Five years have passed since that second day of infamy. For most of us, it was a nightmare we woke up from. But the memories and the lessons that day taught us linger.

"For a while, it made you a little more appreciative," Holly says. "It's sad – but after a while that wears off."

On the surface, Elizabeth says little has changed in her life, except "it's made me more aware of my surroundings." But the memories surface in her dreams. Since 9/11, she's had dreams of planes going down in front of her or of friends and loved ones being on planes that crashed.

As far as Hervey is concerned, 9/11 "reinforced my belief that there's a whole lot of evil in this world that we need to eliminate – but we never will," he says. It's also reinforced the realization that "life is precious," he adds. "It's to be cherished."

It's not so much 9/11 as her subsequent visits with Guard members at training sites that have impacted Sara's life. Many Guard members have been reactivated, and the stories they tell her are so sad. Some have served three tours already, and they are willing to go back again – not because they have to, but because they know they are needed and because of their commitment to the other members of their unit.

"That kind of strength is phenomenal to me," Sara says.

The aftermath of 9/11 has changed her life in other ways. Her husband was recalled to active duty. When he is done in Germany, he will be assigned to the Pentagon. "He's there where the plane went through," she says.

When Sara thinks back on all the 9/11 and Iraq stories she has heard, she is most impressed with the pure selflessness that so many Americans exhibited in putting aside their differences to pull together in a time of need. She hopes that lesson is not lost as 9/11 fades into the past.